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It is held that in a sense, American society educates for prejudice. Negroes and whites develop a bias for the white race at an early age.

Preference for the white race was evident among young children when the majority of 253 Negro children in Massachusetts and Arkansas were asked to choose between a white and a colored doll; children preferred the white dolls.

In Lynchburg, Virginia, Negro and white children chose white playmates when tested with a series of photographs. Preference for whites on the part of Negro children indicates a negative attitude toward racial self-identification and self-concept.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF RACIAL BIAS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

J. Kenneth Morland

Studies consistently show that racial bias develops early in life. The author discusses the source of bias, its implications, and the school's responsibility in combating it. Mr. Morland is chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Randolph-Macon Woman's College.

In a sense, American society educates for prejudice. Studies in both Northern and Southern communities in the United States show that Negro as well as white children develop a bias for the white race at an early age. This bias is indicated by both a preference for and an identification with whites rather than with Negroes. While racial bias does not necessarily imply rejection because of race, and is therefore somewhat different from racial prejudice, it is a foundation upon which racial prejudice can be erected. These studies show, further, that American society itself lays this foundation, because children learn their biases through contact with attitudes of racial prejudice and with overt results of racial discrimination.

Racial Preference

While investigations of racial attitudes of young children have varied in methods, the results have generally been consistent in showing racial preference. This is not to imply, however, that there are no regional differences in racial attitudes. One study has suggested that within each race there is significant regional variation in the age at which preschool children learn to recognize race differences. This study found that white children in segregated Southern nursery schools learned to make correct racial designations at an earlier age than Negro children.[1] This is in direct contrast to what

[1] Morland, J. Kenneth. "Racial Recognition by Nursery School Children in Lynchburg, Virginia," *Social Forces*, December, 1958, *37*, 134.

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has been found in integrated nursery schools in the North.[2] But in all regions where studies have been made, young children have shown a preference for whites over Negroes. Thus, the Clarks found that a majority of 253 Negro children in Massachusetts and in Arkansas who were asked to choose between white and colored dolls showed a preference for white dolls.[3] Furthermore, the children were more likely to characterize the colored dolls as looking "bad," while the white dolls were more likely to be described as "nice" and as having "a nice color." In another study, which used a picture test, Horowitz found the same preference among white children in New York, Georgia, and Tennessee.[4]

In a study of 407 Negro and white nursery-school children in Lynchburg, Virginia, the author also found a preference for whites.[5] Subjects were shown a set of pictures of Negroes and whites and were asked several questions concerning the ones with whom they would rather play. A strong preference for white playmates was indicated by a large majority of both Negro and white children in each of the age categories tested, regardless of whether or not they could use racial terms to differentiate those in the pictures.

Racial Self-Identification

Most of the studies of racial attitudes in young children agree that Negroes are less likely than whites to make correct racial self-identification. Thus, when the Clarks, in the study cited earlier, asked Negro children to "Give me the doll that looks like you" (the subjects could choose from Negro and white dolls), far fewer chose a Negro doll than had demonstrated the ability to distinguish between white and Negro dolls. Awareness of race differences on the part of these Negro children did not lead to accuracy of racial self-identification.

In the Lynchburg study, the author also found that Negro children tended to make incorrect racial self-identification.[6] When

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[2] *See,* for example, Mary Ellen Goodman, *Race Awareness in Young Children* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Press, Inc., 1952), 178–79, 223.

[3] Clark, Kenneth B., and Clark, Mamie P. "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children" in *Readings in Social Psychology,* Theodore M. Newcomb and Eugene L. Hartley, editors. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947, 169–78.

[4] Horowitz, Eugene L. "The Development of Attitude toward the Negro," *Archives of Psychology,* No. 194, January, 1936.

[5] Morland, J. Kenneth. "Racial Acceptance and Preference of Nursery School Children in a Southern City," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development,* 1962, *8,* 271–80.

[6] Morland, J. Kenneth. "Racial Self-Identification: A Study of Nursery School Children." A paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Catholic Sociological Society, Washington, D. C., September, 1962.

shown a set of pictures and asked which children (Negro or white) they looked more like, a majority of Negro subjects identified themselves with white children. White subjects, on the other hand, identified themselves with children of their own race. Similar results were found regardless of the age or racial recognition ability of the subjects.

In their study of prejudice among young school children in Philadelphia, Trager and Yarrow asked Negro and white subjects indirectly about racial self-identification. These investigators showed their respondents a picture containing both a white and a colored child and asked whether the white child was glad he was white and if he sometimes wanted to be colored, and whether the colored child was glad he was colored and if he sometimes wanted to be white. A majority of both Negro and white subjects stated that the white child was glad he was white and did not want to be colored, but the colored child was not glad he was colored and that he sometimes wished he were white. It is logical to assume that these subjects were projecting their own feelings about racial self-identification.[7]

Source of Bias

How can we account for these persistent findings indicating a bias for whites by both Negro and white children? Some argue that there may be a "natural" preference for light skin. They point out that *black* is frequently associated with darkness and evil, as in expressions like "black magic," "black lies," "blacklisted," and the like. In contrast, *white* often suggests purity, cleanliness, brightness, and hope. But the assumption that it is the nature of things that dictates the superiority of white over black is open to serious question. When cross-cultural comparisons are made, little doubt remains that the use of colors to designate approval or disapproval is culture-based, rather than being "natural" or in any way inevitable. A Cherokee creation myth tells of how God succeeded in making the Indian a rich, lovely brown color, after failing with the "overdone," burnt black man and the "underdone," sick-looking white man. The Honorable R. S. Garfield Todd, former prime minister of Southern Rhodesia, tells of the following complimentary introduction by a Negro African school prefect. The prefect told his Negro audience that although Mr. Todd had a white skin, "his heart is as black as ours."

In the author's opinion, the most logical explanation of the pref-

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[7] Trager, Helen G., and Yarrow, Marian Radke. *They Learn What They Live: Prejudice in Young Children.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952, pp. 121–44.

erence for and identification with whites by both Negro and white children is the result of the higher status of the white in American society. Children of both races see the superior positions of whites—in books, in magazines, on television, in movies, and in pictures on the walls of their schools. Whites live in better houses, have more money, and are in positions of power. It seems reasonable to believe that this bias for whites reflects a desire to be associated with the more privileged race.

Results of the Lynchburg study support this explanation in several ways. As indicated earlier, a clear majority of the children of both races showed a preference for and identification with whites before they had developed the ability to recognize race differences or even to use the terms *white* and *colored*. This suggests that learning to prefer and to identify with whites is not simply a matter of direct verbal instruction, but may well be the result of indirect teaching of the environment itself. Other writers have also questioned the importance of direct inculcation in the development of racial attitudes in young children. Quinn, for example, reports that among the white Southerners she studied, verbal instruction was rarely resorted to in transmitting racial attitudes. In the rare instances when such instruction was used, it was justified in other than racial terms.[8]

The Lynchburg study also shows that racial bias develops early, for a majority of even the three-year-olds of both races, as well as most of the four- and five-year-olds, preferred and identified with whites. It is likely that these reactions at such a young age reflect indirect learning from the environment rather than direct teaching of parents and nursery-school teachers.

Finally, the Lynchburg and other comparable studies indicate that bias is not developed from direct contact with members of the other race. Rather, it is the result of contact with other attitudes and with the results of racial discrimination itself. In the Lynchburg study, it was noted that contact between Negro and white children was rare, but by nursery-school age, both had learned to prefer white to Negro playmates and to identify with whites rather than with Negroes.

Radke, Trager, and Davis explain the basis of such learning in the following way:

> The child entering school already has a long past of social learning. He brings with him perceptions of the self and differentiations of his social environment. . .

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[8] Quinn, Olive Westbrooke. "The Transmission of Racial Attitudes among White Southerners," *Social Forces,* October, 1954, *33,* 42.

> The social learning in these early years has taken place mainly within the family and play groups of children. Through these agents the child becomes aware of and reacts to social forces which constitute culture; through them content, structuring, and attitudes concerning his social-psychological environment are conveyed to him; and cultural standards and mores begin to have consequences for his personality and behavior.
>
> In this process of socialization, one of the important components of the culture which the child takes over, and one of the important determinants of his needs and his social and self perceptions is the factor of social groups in society. Even while the child's experience is within the bounds of his family, values of class and group enter into his world as they are part of the family life and customs, and as they affect the goals and anxieties of his parents. As the child's experience extends to neighborhood and school, there is greater opportunity for cultural values with respect to groups to affect his outlook on life.[9]

In a society characterized by racial prejudice and discrimination, it follows that the child will acquire attitudes and modes of behavior appropriate in such a society, just as he acquires other responses demanded by the society.

Implications of Racial Bias

The preceding discussion has sought to show that racial bias develops very early in the life of the American child and that the chief factor in this development is the prevalence of racial prejudice and discrimination in American society. It is apparent that the child does not acquire knowledge about race and develop attitudes toward race differences from any particular institution. He "absorbs" ideas and attitudes about race from those nearest him and from the way in which society itself is structured. Unless some institution takes the responsibility for teaching accurate information about race and helps to develop a learning situation in which democratic values may be practiced between children of different races, it is likely that most young children will develop racial biases.

When white children realize that being a member of the white race is an advantage, they are likely to develop positive attitudes toward being white and negative attitudes toward being Negro. Bias for whites will probably grow into prejudice against Negroes, especially as white adults begin to insist on it. When Negro children find, through experience, that membership in their race is a handi-

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[9] Radke, Marian, Trager, Helen G., and Davis, Hadassah. "Social Perceptions and Attitudes of Children," *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 1949, *40*, 331.

cap, they are apt to develop negative reactions toward their race as they take on the evaluation of those dominant in the society. James Baldwin, a Negro writer, has expressed the basis of self-rejection in the following way: "Negroes in this country—and Negroes do not, strictly or legally speaking, exist in any other—are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. The world is white, and they're black . . . ."[10] At the same time, Negroes are likely to develop ambivalent attitudes toward those imposing racial discrimination. Members of the dominant race are resented because they enforce unequal treatment, but they are also envied because of their advantages.

The School and Racial Knowledge

One way to reduce racial bias and consequent racial prejudice is to present accurate information about race and race differences, for false notions of racial superiority can undergird such bias and prejudice. The school, in my opinion, is the most appropriate organization to take the responsibility for developing democratic attitudes, just as it takes the responsibility for imparting valid knowledge about other important fields.[11] We need to realize, however, that although sound knowledge is necessary to combat false information, it is not sufficient to change attitudes. Facts do not speak for themselves; rather, they are interpreted through the experience and biases of those hearing them. At the same time, accurate information can challenge incorrect beliefs that support bias and prejudice and can at least make such support shift to other grounds.

An obvious difficulty in expecting public schools to teach scientifically valid knowledge about race is the fact that in the states where this knowledge is most lacking there is strong racial prejudice among those in political authority. At least three Southern states have given official support to books purporting to prove the racial superiority of whites.[12]

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[10] Letter from a Region in My Mind," *New Yorker,* November 17, 1962, *38,* 65.

[11] Cyril Bibby, in *Race, Prejudice and Education* (London: William Heineman, Ltd., 1959), suggests ways in which teachers can deal with race differences. The book is clear, readable, and anthropologically sound.

[12] The Louisiana State Board of Education adopted a resolution on July 25, 1961, urging administrators, teachers, and "mature" students to read the book *Race and Reason: A Yankee View,* by Carleton Putnam (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961), which advocates the inferiority of the Negro race. The Governor of Mississippi proclaimed October 26, 1961, as "Race and Reason Day" to give special honor to this book. The state of Alabama authorized the writing of a book designed to prove "that the white race, intellectually, is superior to the Negro . . . ."—*Southern School News,* December, 1961, p. 1.

It may be a long time before school boards in some states are willing to have their schools deal objectively with race, but many boards, unhindered by a racist policy, could begin at once. Colleges could also make this a part of their programs of teacher preparation.

The School and Racial Attitudes

While the school cannot be expected to deal with the extreme prejudice resulting from deep-seated personality disturbances, it can modify milder forms of prejudice. The present paper assumes that the racial bias and prejudice that characterize the majority of children in America are "normal" and relatively mild. The author believes that both the child who is virtually without prejudice and the one who is highly prejudiced are deviants from the American norm.[13] The racial attitudes that might be altered by the school are those developed by most children in the course of growing up. More hostile and authoritarian children, whose personalities "require" prejudice, are not likely to be affected.

The school can help to lessen "normal" prejudice by providing a setting in which children of different races can associate on a basis of equality. Studies have shown that racial bias and prejudice can be modified by experiences that take place in such a setting. For example, in a one-year period changes have been reported in attitudes of racially prejudiced white students in newly integrated schools of Atlanta and New Orleans. Martin Coles, a psychiatrist, has spent the last year and a half interviewing Negro and white pupils in these two cities to find out the effects of attending integrated schools. The following portion of an interview tells of the change that occurred in a white high-school student after a year of integration:

> I've changed a lot of my ideas. You can't help having respect for them [the Negro pupils], the way they've gone through the year so well. They're nice kids, that's what you find out after a while. They speak well, and are more intelligent than a lot of my friends. . . . I sneered a few times the first few weeks, but I just couldn't keep it up, and I felt kind of bad and kind of sorry for them. . . . Next thing I knew I was quiet when some of my friends were calling them all the old names. . . . I felt that I never again would look at them the way I did last September and before.

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[13] *See* Miriam Reimann, "How Children Become Prejudiced" in *American Minorities: A Textbook of Readings in Intergroup Relations*, Milton L. Barron, editor. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957, 94–104.

> . . . I can't really describe any time or episode. . . . No, it was just a kind of gradual feeling.[14]

Such direct contact is probably a necessary condition for changing feelings of prejudice, but it is not often a sufficient condition. Coles found that some of the white children who had strong feelings of rejection for Negroes did not change.

In their study of young children in Philadelphia, Trager and Yarrow concluded that children learn prejudices not only from the larger social environment of adult values and behavior patterns but also from the content of the curriculum and its values. They contend that "If democratic attitudes are to be learned they must be specifically taught and experienced."[15] The experiment that they conducted in Philadelphia schools demonstrated that democratic attitudes can be taught to young children if the teachers are properly prepared and are willing to make a deliberate effort.

Educators, then, are faced with a great challenge. At present, little is being done to counter the biased and prejudiced racial attitudes that develop among American children; valid information on race differences is very rarely given to them. This failure to provide opportunities for learning about race differences inhibits a child's understanding of others; and, perhaps more important, such silence about race differences may be interpreted as agreement with the evaluation of the larger society. Admittedly the task of changing racial bias and prejudice is a difficult one, but it is none the less essential for the maintenance and development of a democracy.

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[14] Coles, Martin Robert. "Children under Desegregation: A Preliminary Psychiatric Report." Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional Council, 1962, p. 24

[15] Trager and Yarrow, *op. cit.*, p. 341. *See also* Radke, Trager, and Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–33.